

OH-73

Part 7 (pp 274-277) 19 July 1967

Interview by Paul D. Hopper

3. DDE would have carried it out if it
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4. Concept did change during DDE Admin

~~I regard him. He's a great fellow.~~

OH-73 Columbia University Oral History Project, DDE Ly.

Interview with Gordon Gray by Paul D. Hopper. Part 7, 19 July 67, pp. 274-277

Q: I may have asked you before, Mr. Gray, and perhaps you would prefer not to comment on it, but to what extent was the Bay of Pigs fiasco, so to speak, planned in the National Security Council, and to what extent did the incoming President more or less take it upon himself to act as he did?

Gray: Well, I can only speak of what was done in the Eisenhower Administration. This had never been a National Security Council matter. It was a matter for a special group involving the other Departments, State, Defense, CIA, which was dealt with in a series of meetings with the President, beginning in March of 1960. Not in the Security Council. There never was a plan in the Eisenhower Administration. There was a concept of the approval of training of people, and of making equipment available. But by the time, when the Eisenhower Administration went out of office, there was no military plan. In fact, I never heard of the Bay of Pigs until the Bay of Pigs. Well, maybe that's not true, but certainly in connection with the Eisenhower Administration, we had never begun to focus on anything like landing points. There just was no plan, in the military sense. That was devised afterwards.

I don't know the extent to which President Kennedy considered the Cuban thing in the National Security Council. I have no idea. I don't know how deeply he was involved, but he must have

Cuban
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Nov 60

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been pretty deeply involved, because you recall he took the full responsibility for what happened. It's my impression that the single thing which might have permitted a different result, that is, the ^{denial} ~~Admitt~~ of air cover, was a Presidential decision. But how that may have related to the National Security Council in the Kennedy Administration, I simply don't know. Obviously, of course, the Special Assistant, McBundyx, must have been deeply involved in it.

Q: I raised the point because it seems to me that I have read in the public press that people in the Kennedy Administration, perhaps the President himself, considered that this was in effect a commitment, you might say, by the Eisenhower Administration, which they more or less were obliged to proceed with.

Gray: Well, it is true that they had quite a number of trained and equipped individuals, and probably wouldn't have known quite what to do with them. But there wasn't any military plan formulated, by the time the Eisenhower Administration went out. Of course, the President was fully aware of and conversant with the decision to train and arm individuals. And the concept was one that was sort of changing in the Eisenhower Administration. First we were thinking in terms of the old infiltration of small groups. Then they were thinking of the possibility of landing of people, during unit-sized groups. And no decisions had been reached at that time.

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It was only that there was training. ~~//X/AA/ST//AA/YY/YY~~

That x was clearly authorized, and it was clearly contemplated
that there would be or could be a military action. But it simply
is not true that Kennedy inherited a plan he couldn't change. As
a matter of fact, the planning that was done in his administration
was changed. The Bay of Pigs was not the first landing point.
That was changed. But none of that, no planning process in the
Eisenhower Administration had got to the point of discussing
what would be the landing point.

I will say, I would have to say in any discussion of the
Bay of Pigs, that I'm as sure as I'm sitting here that if this
had all developed in the Eisenhower Administration, President
Eisenhower would have seen it through to its conclusion. Because
I remember him saying to the group in the very beginning, when
he began to approve training, he said, "Now, boys, I want to tell
you something. Unless you're going to look on this thing as
something you're going to see through from beginning to end, let's
not start anything." He repeatedly told them that, when they
were considering the thing. He said, "Let's not talk about this
unless, whatever you want to try and do in this, think in terms
of being successful. If you can't, why -- "

I'm just sure he would have -- And I think if Kennedy
had been in office a year longer, if it had happened in the
second year of his administration, he would have seen it through.
That's my guess. He was not lacking in courage or guts or firmness.

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I'd say maybe some of his advisors talked him out of --

Q: -- that's certainly where we made the big mistake, as we look back on it now, in terms of foreign policy, because had the invasion so to speak been successful, it would have aroused a storm of protest in some quarters, but by and large, within a short period of time, we would have been highly complimented for doing it. But as it turned out, we got all the blame anyway.

*More
integrated
by
intention*

Gray: We got the criticism of everybody: Those who think it was bad because we started it, and of those who would have thought it was good, because we didn't finish it.

Well, maybe we should break off here.

Q: All right, Sir.



Ike Speaks Out: Bay of Pigs Was All JFK's

Recently biographical sketches have been published of President Kennedy by former members of his personal staff. Included in these biographies are the authors' respective versions of the late President's intimate musings, deliberations, reasoning and conclusions over the episode of the Bay of Pigs. These biographies refer to former President Eisenhower's role during his administration in events leading up to the Bay of Pigs denouement.

Fortunately President Eisenhower is here to speak with authority on the part he played long before the tragedy of the Bay of Pigs. So I have asked him if he would be willing, in the interest of historic accuracy, to give the public the facts about these earlier events. In a recent meeting at Gettysburg with Earl Mazo and me, President Eisenhower gave us an account of the situation as it existed when he left the White House. Earl Mazo has written these facts for Newsday.

Harry F. Guggenheim
Editor and Publisher, Newsday

SEP 10 1965

B- EARL MAZO

After our country's humiliation at the Bay of Pigs in 1961, Republican Ex-President Eisenhower's only comment was to call for bipartisan unity behind Democratic President Kennedy. That was in keeping with Eisenhower's lifelong practice of supporting the nation's commander-in-chief in times of crisis.

Over the years Gen. Eisenhower has demonstrated little taste for political partisanship and absolutely none for partisan excesses. In fact, he usually has ignored politically tinged distortions on his performance as President, military leader and elder statesman.

Now, however, he feels it would be well to set the record straight on at least a couple of items in recent intimate histories of the Kennedy administration by Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. and Theodore C. Sorenson, ranking members of Kennedy's staff. The general and several of his knowledgeable former government associates view the Schlesinger and Sorenson attempts to link the Eisenhower administration with the Cuba invasion fiasco and discredit Eisenhower-appointed military and intelligence experts as a perversion of history and a disservice to the late President Kennedy, who never sought to duck responsibility for his executive decisions.

The specifically disputed material by both writers is

summed up in this paragraph from the Sorenson version: "On Jan. 20, 1961, John Kennedy inherited the plan, the planners, and most troubling of all, the Cuban exile brigade . . . Unlike an inherited policy statement or executive order, this inheritance could not be simply disposed of by presidential rescission or withdrawal . . ."

Eisenhower declares, "There was no tactical or operational plan even discussed" as of the day he turned the presidency over to John Kennedy. During the transition period between the election in November, 1960, and the inauguration in January, 1961, Eisenhower reviewed for his successor all pending matters, including a secret program inaugurated less than a year before to equip and train anti-Castro Cuban refugees. The retiring President stressed that there had been no decisions as to how the Cuban forces would be used, if at all. Eisenhower had made no commitments that might bind the new President in dealing with the Castro problem. In fact, the armed refugee group was still so small and relatively unprepared that it could easily have been disbanded if the incoming administration considered its existence unnecessary.

As for the nonpolitical experts Kennedy chose to retain for his administration—notably Allen Dulles, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and the military Joint Chiefs of Staff—Eisenhower says: "These men over decades of devoted service have shown their capabilities, their sense of logic, their understanding of the problems involved in this kind of venture. There is no more expert

group in their profession than these men . . . I had the greatest confidence in them."

Nothing the former President was told by Kennedy and others after the Bay of Pigs debacle diminished his faith and confidence in Dulles and the military chiefs. On the other hand, he believes the very disparagement of these seasoned professionals shows how unqualified the former presidential assistants were to deal with the sort of problem involved in a critical international venture like the Bay of Pigs invasion.

Like most Americans, President Eisenhower welcomed the end of the Batista dictatorship in 1959 and hoped the new regime of Fidel Castro would live up to its promises of free elections and democracy in the exotic island republic just eight jet minutes from Florida. Within a year, however, Castro created a dictatorship that was worse even than Batista's, and President Eisenhower had concluded that strong measures might be required to thwart what appeared to be Castro's intention of establishing an outpost for Communist subversion in the Western Hemisphere.

Exactly what would have to be done—and when—remained to be thought out and decided. But the gravity of the situation neither awed nor frightened those facing it. Eisenhower and his administration's military and intelligence experts were not strangers to the nuances of contending with Communist intrusion in Latin America. Ex-Dictator Jacobo Arbenz Guzman, whose efforts to make Guatemala a haven for the Soviets led to his downfall in 1954, would bear witness to that.

In mid-March, 1960, President Eisenhower decided that the U.S. would secretly aid anti-Castro Cubans. The CIA was directed to train and equip volunteers at bases in Guatemala, Panama and southern Florida. The covert military instruction program was started partly in response to pleas by hundreds of refugees for something constructive to do. It was felt training would bolster the spirits of thousands who were fleeing the Castro dictatorship, and would give them hope that, in time, they would be able to "do the job" of ousting the Communist regime.

In essence, the long-range Eisenhower policy was to encourage and prepare Cubans to liberate their country. President Eisenhower kept in close touch with developments through the summer and autumn, and personally reviewed numerous ideas and suggestions that normally would have been sifted out before reaching the White House. (For example, he rejected a proposal that the Cubans be trained in Samoa to insure tighter security than was possible in Central America.)

In recalling that period, the general notes the Bay of Pigs was never mentioned or considered in discussions of possible alternatives and contingencies. Most attention focused on prospects for an operation of some sort in or near the Escambray Mountains where a government in exile might establish itself on Cuban soil.

Before there could be serious planning, however, the Cubans needed not only a well-supplied fighting force but also the leadership to organize a functioning government in exile. The leader or leaders had to be recognized and accepted by the Cuban people. That eliminated experienced individuals from the Batista regime and several leaders of peppery political factions who bristled at the thought of cooperating or sharing the glory of overthrowing Castro.

The Cubans were still without their own leadership when President Eisenhower retired and President Kennedy was inaugurated as America's commander-in-chief. In Washington, the changeover of executive command, with Democrats replacing Republicans in nearly every key post